Rumina decollata (Linnaeus, 1758) (Achatinidae) Discovered in Southern California

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(1 Text figure)

Rumina decollata is of Mediterranean origin and probably was introduced into the United States in the early 1800's. Prior to the present finding it was known to occur at many localities across the southern United States from the Atlantic seaboard to Yuma Mesa in Arizona. It is an omnivorous plant feeder and is cannibalistic on its own and other mollusk species. The decollate snail is not easy to detect because of its rather inconspicuous size (particularly of juveniles) and earth color, and because it burrows into the soil presumably to avoid dehydration and to feed on subterranean plant tissue.

The quarantine status of *Rumina decollata* as a potential pest in California is set forth in the State of California Department of Agriculture Quarantine Memorandum E-83 (1958). The main reason for submitting this note is to solicit the assistance of those with malacological interests in reporting the occurrence of *R. decollata* elsewhere in the State.

The first infestation to be reported in California was in the city of Riverside. On January 12, 1966, Mr. Gilbert L. Challet, a technician in this Department, brought in four dormant specimens for determination which he had picked off the wall of his garage after a rain. County and state agricultural inspectors at once surveyed the immediate area and found that the infestation was restricted to seven properties in the same block. No snails had crossed the streets to adjacent city blocks. Soon thereafter a press release with pictures of the snail was made and during the next week reports from interested citizens led to two more infestations in Riverside. Write-ups also appeared in adjoining counties, and the presence of colonies of *Rumina decollata* was verified in East Los Angeles, La Habra Heights, Claremont, Los Alamitos, and Costa Mesa. So far, positive findings have been reported only from areas where the news stories carried the picture of the snail. Snails were plentiful at all sites, usually on the surface of the ground or shallowly to partially buried beneath cover plantings such as ivy (*Hedera*), *Mesembryanthemum*, or in weed growth along fences. The largest infestation occurred over a recently subdivided 80-acre avocado orchard in La Habra Heights. Here, *R. decollata* coexists with *Helix aspersa* Müller and occurs mainly in beds of *Mesembryanthemum*.

Laboratory testing of various molluscicides is being conducted by Mr. Joseph Pappas (Department of Entomology, University of California, Riverside), and he has found that *Rumina decollata* is not killed by presently available commercial baits with metaldehyde, guthion, or zectran as the active ingredients.

From the size and distribution of the known infestations, and because of the known ages of housing developments on some of the sites, it is thought that *Rumina decollata* has been in southern California for at least 7 to 10 years. Consequently, eradication is no longer thought to be practical, and Californians will be obliged to learn to live with the decollate snail. Its chief mode of entry into the State is not difficult to deduce, particularly when the occupant of one property admitted bringing in potted ferns from an infested area in Arizona. A few such instances of smuggling past border quarantine inspectors, followed by exchanging of plants among gardening enthusiasts within the state, and . . . . . enough said.

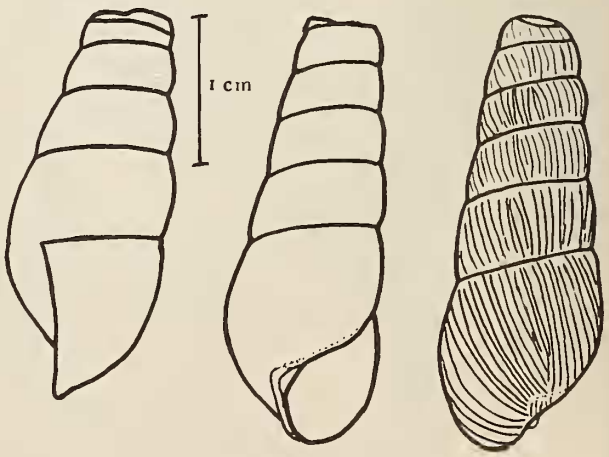

Figure 1

Rumina decollata (Linnaeus, 1758): Sketch of shell from three aspects. The decollate shell is the "tip-off."